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ABSTRACT

Although urban and suburban school districts in New York have acquired experience in developing programs for language minority students, many English-as-a-Second-Language programs do not seem appropriate for English Creole-speaking West Indian immigrant students. The Multicultural Education Center at Baruch College (New York) has developed suggestions for programs for West Indian students, presented here as a series of questions and answers about characteristics of this ethnic group and its needs. It is difficult to generalize about these students, whose backgrounds and experiences vary greatly. Most of these students speak some variety of Creole, and their English experience varies considerably. Many districts are moving to specialized programs to address the needs of these students. Basic steps that these districts have taken, from start-up through implementation and continuation, are outlined. Teaching for these students should focus on and reflect a holistic learning environment that integrates an awareness and understanding of Creole with academic skills and second language acquisition. Some resources for program planning are detailed. An appendix lists them and presents the agenda for a conference on the problems of Creole-speaking students. (SLD)

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Meeting the Needs of Newly-arrived West Indian Students in New York Public Schools

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Introduction

Among the many changes occurring in the enrollment patterns of New York State public schools, one of the most dramatic is the rapid increase in newly arrived students from the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean.[1] According to recent estimates by the New York State Education Department, 20,881 or approximately one in every five immigrant students enrolled in New York State public schools in the school year (1990-91) had immigrated to this country from one of the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean. The largest percentages of these students are coming from Jamaica (41% or 8553 of the total West Indian student population for the state), Guyana (29% or 6102) and Trinidad and Tobago (18% or 3705 of the total). Most (over 80%) have come to reside in school districts in New York City (mostly in Brooklyn and Queens) with most of the remainder enrolled in school districts in Westchester and Rockland counties and Long Island[2] .

In recent years, urban and suburban school districts in New York have acquired experience in developing effective programs for other groups of language minority students. They have responded to the need for assessment and placement procedures, curriculum design and materials acquisition and the involvement of language minority parents. It seems logical that this experience would facilitate the smooth integration of West Indian students into the educational mainstream. However, both quantitative measurements such as standardized tests data and drop-out figures and the qualitative information provided by teachers and administrators tell another story. Many ESL programs don't seem to be appropriate for English Creole-speaking West Indian students.

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[1] L.D. Carrington (1983) has pointed out the lack of precision of the term "English-speaking" when applied to those Caribbean countries where English is the official language. The alternative term "countries of the West Indies" has also been a subject of debate concerning which countries the term encompasses. For the purposes of this paper, the term "countries of origin" refers to those countries which have had the largest number of students enrolling in New York State public schools. These include: Antigua-Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Bermuda, Belize, British Virgin Islands, Dominica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts (St. Christopher)-Nevis, Montserrat, St. Lucia, and Trinidad & Tobago.

[2] Source: Emergency Immigrant Education Assistance Act (EIEA) Census, 1989-91, New York State Education Department: Division of Bilingual Education, Albany, New York, 1992.

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Public school educators are increasingly voicing the concern that something "in addition", and in many cases, "instead of" needs to be done. At issue is the educational welfare and success of literally thousands of students who are legally owed an accessible quality public education and are not receiving it.

The present paper reflects an on-going commitment by the Multicultural Education Center at Baruch College to focus attention on the issues of educational equity bearing on all students, particularly language minority students, and to serve as a resource for teachers and administrators who are seeking to develop effective programs. It has been structured around the questions most frequently asked by teachers and administrators working with and in behalf of West Indian students. While this information may not reflect the full gamut of concerns facing New York State educators in relation to West Indian students, it does provide a representative sampling of many of the most pressing.

1. Are the increasing numbers of West Indian students enrolling in our school/school district reflective of a growing trend in the region, or is our situation atypical? What can we expect in the future?

Judging from the most recent projections, the trend towards increased enrollment of students from the West Indies in New York public schools will continue state-wide. Although the number of students will tend to be greater in the urban areas (in particular Queens, Brooklyn, and Westchester school districts), it is reasonable to expect that most school districts, including rural and suburban ones, will experience an increase in the numbers of students that will be enrolling from these countries. Based on current growth patterns, the next five years will see an increase of at least 22% in the enrollment of West Indian students in New York State school districts. The proportionate number of students from individual countries will vary somewhat depending on specific economic and political conditions. However, in general terms, the countries showing the largest numbers of school-age persons migrating to the state are expected to remain the same. These countries of origin are Jamaica, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago.[1]

2. Why are families and individuals immigrating to the United States?

Recent studies indicate that the two major reasons for families from the West Indies to migrate to the states are economic and educational. Despite the current recession in this country, the perception abides among many West Indians that opportunities for economic and educational advancement in the northeast far exceed opportunities of a similar nature in

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their home countries, and in some cases, they do. In the immediate future, West Indians will naturally be drawn to communities where extended family support systems exist and/or where employment, professional, skilled and unskilled opportunities are said to exist. Usually, the promise of these opportunities is communicated by word-of-mouth by visiting emigrants in their home countries.

3. Do all newly arrived West Indian students share certain cultural characteristics in common? If so, what are they? What differences exist among the various nationalities or cultural groups of the West Indies? Which differences are the ones that are especially important for teachers and administrators to be aware of?

Any generalizations about cultural similarities among students of the various national groups of the West Indies must be made with caution, if at all. Differences as a result of class, subculture, and geographic area within each country must also be considered in understanding cultural identity. Just as there are significant differences within and across the various national and subnational groups that comprise the Spanish-speaking countries of the Caribbean, so too there are critical differences in the values, customs, and attitudes of groups within and across the spectrum of social groups that make up each of the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean. It may be useful for teachers and administrators to seek out local members of the West Indian community to inform themselves of these traditions and values. However, it is important to add a note of caution that each individual necessarily reflects only a piece of the larger cultural picture so that care must be taken not to generalize inappropriately. A growing body of literature for and by educators about the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of West Indian students is available and can provide a good complement to local sources.[3]

4. Can any generalizations be made about the norms and customs that characterize the child-rearing patterns of West Indian immigrant parents?

Each immigrant family's story is unique. Each child's experience is an individual story. One common pattern among many diverse experiences involves the journey of one or both parents to the U.S. to get settled financially (a process that often takes years). When their economic situation has stabilized, the parents then send for the children, beginning with the youngest, and working up the age ladder, as their financial situation

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[3] Among non-fiction resources, see especially Carrington, 1990; Pollard, 1990; and Coelho, 1988 and 1991. For interesting and useful fiction resources for teachers, see especially the short stories, "Jeffie Lemmington and Me" by Merle Hodge, "My mother" by Velma Pollard, and "Ascot" by Olive Senior in D'Costa and Pollard (1980).

permits. Economic support is sent home to the caregivers of the children, usually a grandparent, aunt, or uncle or other member of the extended family. This individual serves as the parent in absentia, raising the children in the home country, often for long periods of time. In this world, children come to identify with the caregiving relative as the central person in their lives. They are usually raised in a very disciplined fashion in this home, usually with a clear sense of place, worth and social limits both within the extended family and the community in which they reside. The immigration experience for many young West Indians is often associated with a wrenching emotional separation from this primary caretaker and a reunion with parents often after years of separation and during the teen years. Frequently, both parents and child hardly know each other when this process of reuniting as a family takes place. Expectations are often very different and frequently conflict.

5. What attitudes towards authority do immigrant children from the West Indies bring with them?

Many teachers and administrators ask about the kind of attitudes that can be expected from West Indian students in relation to the authority of the teacher and the school. There is no easy generalization in answer to these questions, again because of the diversity of cultural norms and individual experience. In most West Indian countries, there is an emphasis placed on respect for elders and persons in positions of authority. Children learn from an early age that they have an appropriate place in the hierarchy of relationships and that there is an appropriate set of behaviors, respectful, deferring, considerate, which attend that place. Often those assumptions are challenged when these children come to the U.S.. Teachers frequently perceive newly-arrived West Indian students as diffident to authority or excessively shy and unwilling to acknowledge the school's authority system. Excessive reticence in the classroom is a common observation. Other teachers report that West Indian students have a tendency to act out and behave rebelliously, flaunting and challenging the authority of teachers and administrators. The average child may appear glib and, at times, crass. Whatever the behaviors of newly-arrived students (or the perception of those behaviors by school staff), most teachers find it helpful to know that most West Indian students bring with them a well-established tradition of respect for adult authority both at home and school.

6. Do most West Indian families come to the U.S. with the intention of permanent migration?

Although no recent studies exist on immigrant aspirations, it is safe to say that a significant number, possibly the majority, of West Indians come to the U.S. with the hope that they will be able to gain formal education and or material wealth fairly readily and then return to their home country. Confronted by the realities of life in the U.S., there is a well-documented tendency to idealize the life left behind and to see the time spent in the U.S. as temporary, even though it continues either for a long time or permanently. Alienated by an unknown, often hostile environment, many do not become involved in the local politics of their communities, because they do not perceive themselves as having a permanent stake and because, in relation to school politics, they believe that decision-making in the schools is appropriately left to the professionals in charge. There is very little parallel in their countries for the traditions of representative school boards and parental involvement which are a part of the U.S. tradition. For school officials, this seeming disinterest on the part of parents is often misinterpreted as apathy or lack of support for the school, when in fact, most West Indian parents hold a high regard for the work of educators and place the education of their children at the center of their aspirations and priorities.

7. What role does the Church play in the lives of West Indian immigrant families?

For most families in the West Indies, the Church plays a very central and significant role in the life of the family, both socially and spiritually. It is not unusual for the departure of an individual family member for residence in the U.S. to be the occasion for prayer, reflection and celebration within the Church. Once the move has occurred, the churches within communities where West Indians reside in the U.S., continue to play a major role as social and cultural mainstays for families of the diaspora. For school officials, churches where West Indians worship can serve as a critical point of linkage with the community.

8. What means of family support and assistance do West Indian families have when they come to the U.S.?

West Indians view their families as being made up of many members beyond what is commonly referred to in this country as the "nuclear family". Often a grandparent or aunt or uncle is a key decision-maker and caretaker. This variety in familial patterns needs to be understood and reinforced by school officials for communication with the home to be effective. Older siblings are often assigned supervisory responsibility for their younger brothers and sisters. In this instance, the family is expecting the school to treat the older

sibling as an appropriate parent substitute, for example in a parent/teacher conference, and is surprised when and if the school does not see the substitution as an appropriate one.

9. What generalizations can be made about gender relationships?

Historically, women from the West Indies have had an easier time than men in finding employment in the U.S. Consequently, women who have immigrated to the States have often assumed the role of primary breadwinner in the household as frequently as men. This is in stark contrast to the traditional economic roles assigned men and women in countries of the Caribbean. Bonding relationships among men and women assume a variety of forms. Carrington's description of these modes, while referring to the social fabric of life in the Caribbean, is also relevant to post-migration patterns in the U.S.:

> Legally registered marriage as a basis for family establishment or bonding of already existing nuclear units has increased in frequency throughout the history of the region and is one of the models/norms for social units in the several countries. Stable common law relationships are another model/norm. The phenomenon of the intermittently resident adult male adjunct in a female-headed household is common and, quite independently of the personal satisfaction of the participants, has variable acceptability depending upon several factors related both to the participants in the arrangement and the observers of it. These would include social class, levels of discretion and seemliness, degree of support provided or apparently provided to the household, parity of treatment of alternate households by the male adjunct and benefits in the form of status that accompany the relationship.[4]

10. What attitudes do West Indians have towards North Americans?

As is true in many parts of the world, many of the attitudes that West Indians form of the United States and its citizens are derived from the mass media, particularly the movies. North Americans are frequently stereotyped as belonging to either one or two large homogeneous groups (blacks or whites) each with a particular economic level, set of attitudes and values. Children reflect the same misinformation and stereotype to which the family as a whole has been exposed. Teachers and administrators need to be aware of these attitudes and provide a broader informational base for newcomers.

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[4] L.D. Carrington. "Introducing the Caribbean". Paper presented at the Training Institute on Program Development for Students from the English-speaking Countries of the Caribbean. Equity Assistance Center, Harriman, New York (1989).

11. What language do West Indian students speak? Is it English or some variety of English?

Teachers and administrators often ask about the nature of the language spoken by newly-arrived West Indian students. Some, they say, are easily understood; others, with difficulty; some not at all, at least in the first few weeks in the classroom. Often teachers feel that there is a similarity between the language spoken by their new students and English, yet they can't seem to understand what their students are saying. Is it the accent, vocabulary, intonation or a different dialect of English altogether? None of these is the correct answer.

West Indian linguists and educators have written extensively on the topic of the language of West Indians (Carrington, 1976, 1983, in press; Craig, 1976; Roberts, 1988; and Pollard, 1990). The following is a succinct description:

> In each of the "English-speaking" Caribbean countries (except St. Lucia and Dominica), the majority of the population uses as its native language one or more varieties of *Caribbean Atlantic English-lexicon Creole.* These would include Jamaican, Bajan, Trinidadian, Guyanese, etc. The average speaker of any of these varieties considers his language to be a local variant of English and depending upon his sophistication, social attitude and level of information would refer to it as "the dialect", "bad English", "broken English", "we English", "English with a local twang", etc. The association with English arises from the fact that a high proportion of the lexical *forms* in the languages are transparently derived from English. In addition, current loanwords from English contribute to marking underlying structural dissimilarities from English. *The linguistic fact is that these speech varieties are not dialects of English but belong to a separate language group of Creole languages.*[5]

In the same article, the following definition is provided for the term Creole:

> ...those languages that developed during the period of European colonial expansion, the Black slave trade and the plantation phase of Caribbean economy as communication systems between Europeans of diverse linguistic backgrounds on the one hand and West Africans of equally heterogeneous backgrounds. These languages initially served the purpose of cross-cultural communication but eventually found their use expanded to the point of replacing West African languages as primary systems among the displaced Africans and of functioning as auxiliary communication systems within the repertoires of European colonists.6

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[5] Carrington, L.D. " The Challenge of Caribbean language in the Canadian classroom" in *TESL Talk*, Vol. 14, No. 4, p. 16 (1983).
[6] Ibid., p. 17.

While most students can be assumed to speak at least one dialect of Caribbean Atlantic English-lexicon Creole (CAEC), there are also many who also speak a standard Caribbean English. Craig describes the varieties and uses of standard English in the Caribbean as follows:

> Although at least 90 percent of the population in the historically British Caribbean use some form of Creole language as the everyday medium of informal communication, the English language remains the sole official language and vehicle of literacy in the score or so of relevant territories. The English language, therefore, has an importance within the Caribbean region that far surpasses the proportional weight of the population that habitually speaks it, and it remains the model of formal occasion speech even for Creole speakers.[7]

Thus the answer to the question, "What languages do West Indian students speak?" is not an easy one. Most students come to the U.S. speaking some variety of Creole. Many also speak a variety of the standard English spoken in their region, for example, Standard Jamaican English. Frequently the differences in accent between the varieties of standard American English spoken in New York and the varieties of standard English, spoken in the Caribbean, despite their commonality in syntax, are sufficient to cause problems in miscommunication, at least initially for both speakers. If Creole is the only language spoken by a newly arrived West Indian student, which is the case for many, the student will probably have difficulty understanding and being understood by teachers and non-West Indian peers. Some students who speak Creole as their only language come to this country with the mistaken belief that they are speaking a variety of standard Caribbean English and are baffled and frustrated when teachers in U.S. classrooms cannot understand them. The important point for teachers and administrators is not to assume any homogeneous language background for all students. Each student needs to be related to as a separate and individual case.

The time it will take for a speaker of standard Caribbean and American English to understand and be understood by each other varies with the particular language background of the two speakers and with the intensity and regularity of their exposure to each other's variety. So, for example, it can normally take a high school teacher teaching a group of West Indian students during one period of school each day a long time (often many months) before being able to communicate easily with his/her students.

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[7]Craig, D.R., "Toward a Description of Caribbean English" in Braj Kachru, ed., *The Other Tongue:English Across culture, pp. 198-209.*

8 Alleyne, Mervyn C., "Dimensions and Varieties of West Indian English and the Implications for Teaching", *Black Students in Urban Canada Special Issue of TESL TALK, p. 62.*

12. Can speakers of Creole from different countries in the Caribbean easily understand each other? Can teachers expect their students from different countries to communicate easily among themselves?

Creole speakers from different countries of the Caribbean can usually communicate with each other without much difficulty, even though each speaks a different dialect of CAEC. This mutual intelligibility is not, however, automatic, just as immediate facility in communication between speakers of varieties of American English can not be assumed, for example, a conversation between a rural Georgian and an urban Midwesterner. For educators, the most important factor to keep in mind is that students who are newly-arrived from countries in the West Indies cannot be characterized by any single set of language habits and experiences. Some will enter the classroom speaking a variety and dialect of English which will make it relatively easy for them to understand and be understood in the classroom; others will have great difficulty carrying on basic conversations with their teachers and students from areas other than the West Indies. Alleyne has summarized this phenomenon:

> One major problem that educators will face is that of adequately conceptualizing the native speech of the children and its relationship with the target, and in some cases the medium, of instruction. Speech in Jamaica, Guyana, and to a lesser extent Trinidad and Barbados, is very varied. It ranges from the speech of upper-middle class intellectuals and professionals, which is very close to , and certainly mutually intelligible with, corresponding speech in the other English-speaking areas of the world, to the speech of semi-educated rural folk (particularly the very young and the very old)...which bears relatively little relationship (except lexical) with English and is probably not mutually intelligible to any large measure with it. Persons usually occupy zones, and the zone of productive ability is smaller than that of receptive ability.[8]

13. What kind of academic preparation do West Indian students bring with them from their home countries? How can a teacher or administrator find out more about this?

The most important factors for teachers and administrators to keep in mind in relation to academic background is the great diversity in organization and levels of enrollment of West Indian school systems.[9] Many students, particularly those from the rural areas of their countries, enter American classrooms with fewer years of formal education than their age would imply. Universal public school education (K-12) is embraced as a national goal throughout the Caribbean, and outstanding public schools are found throughout the region. Nevertheless, it also is very common for public schools,

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[9] A useful account of the history, organization and major features of selected West Indian school systems is available in *Caribbean Students in Canadian Schools: Book 1.* Chapter 5, pp. 99-128. (Coelho, 1988)

particularly those in rural areas, to be understaffed and poorly equipped in comparison to U.S. standards. Students in remote rural areas often live too far away to attend the public school in their area which limits attendance, as does the requirement in many areas that families pay for their children's books and other school supplies.

In many countries of the West Indies, the Church and other benevolent institutions have historically played an active role in the provision of education and this continues to be true. Denominational schools (particularly Anglican, Catholic and Methodist) make up a large number of the feeder schools from which students have come to the U.S., though as with public schools there is wide variation in their organization and curricula.
Given this diversity of background, the best approach for teachers and administrators seeking to gather information about an individual student is to avoid making assumptions.

14. What kinds of tests are used in West Indian public school systems?

An important aspect of most West Indian students' educational background before they come to this country is their testing experiences. In most Caribbean schools, there is very little testing done of students during their elementary years. In contrast, when they reach the junior high and high school years they must pass through a strenuous system of examination and screening that eventually determines their access to higher education in the West Indies. In most countries, students take a state administered battery of examinations at approximately the age of eleven. Results on these tests are used both as a means of screening out under-achieving students who do not continue on to secondary school and for determining the kind of school that students who continue their studies will attend.

15. What is the most effective kind of program that can be provided for students from these backgrounds?

As the number of Creole-speaking students enrolling in New York State schools continues to grow, many districts are moving to implement specialized programs which address the needs of these students. Most of these programs are still in their infancy, although some are now in their fourth, fifth or sixth year of implementation. *Project OMEGA* (a collaborative effort among four Brooklyn high schools), Community School District #11 (Bronx), Community School District #19 (Brooklyn) and Mount Vernon are all examples of districts that have been working actively in this area for several years. Outside of New York State, there are other school districts which have initiated programs that are increasingly serving as models for those who are initiating new programs, notably the Hartford (Connecticut) Public Schools and in Canada, the Toronto (Ontario) Public Schools.

While programs vary from district to district, there are certain characteristics that the effective ones have in common. First, all of the programs have the strong support of their superintendents and participating building principals, expressed most concretely in a formally articulated policy relating to West Indian students and the incorporation of their linguistic and cultural traditions into the classroom and the curriculum. Such statements are important for the clarity of purpose that they provide to teachers and administrators and other members of the professional network in the district, and as a means for communicating with parents, community and other constituencies within the district with whom the creation of these programs may be the subject of controversy. It is clear that successful programs clearly define and publicly communicate the importance of standard American English and English Creoles as acceptable languages of interaction in the classroom.

Second, effective programs are usually organized in coordination with, but distinct from, the regular bilingual and ESL programs of the district. Placing CAEC-speaking West Indian students in ESL or bilingual classrooms with other language groups often results in frustration and failure for both students and teachers. Materials, techniques, and strategies normally used in ESL and bilingual classrooms are not automatically appropriate for CAEC-speaking students. One major difference is the pace at which a teacher can normally and successfully proceed in developing listening comprehension. This is usually faster for CAEC students than for most ESL students. Upon entry to the classroom, CAEC-speaking students are usually familiar with a far greater range of English vocabulary words than most beginning ESL students. This can facilitate the learning process, although the large number of false cognates that a teacher must be familiar with can also be a hindrance. Suffice to say that effective programs for CAEC-speaking students have their own teaching methodologies and curricula, distinct from the district's ESL program. These need to be clearly laid out for those who teach and administer.

Thirdly, parents are provided with orientation to help them understand and support the rationale and approaches that are the foundation of the program. This feature is crucial to successful programs. The use of English Creole as a medium of interaction in the classroom can be for some West Indian parents, a controversial issue, and needs to be dealt with sensitively by school officials.

Fourth, all effective programs include among their components, a carefully planned staff development program which prepares teachers with the linguistic, cultural and pedagogical information necessary to actually implement the program. In the Appendix of this paper, an outline of the staff development program used by one community school district (CSD #19 in Brooklyn) is included.

Fifth and finally, effective programs use assessment procedures which are appropriate to the particular student population. Most school districts undertaking a program for their West Indian students have already in place established assessment and placement procedures for limited English proficient students. It can be a great temptation to simply apply those procedures. However, in the experience of persons who have developed effective programs, there is a critical need to review those procedures and modify the assessment process in keeping with the particular linguistic, and, to a lesser extent, educational background of West Indian students.

16. What are the basic steps in developing such a program?

School districts which have successfully implemented programs for West Indian students have usually done so in three basic phases:

Start-up

1. Form district-wide committee to identify needs and resources (from the community, district and school), and develop preliminary policy statement towards CAEC and CAEC-speaking students and program designs. Program designs usually include: assessment and placement procedures, administrative and instructional plans, staff development plan, student support and parental involvement.
2. To the extent feasible, hold parent/community meetings to identify community resources that will be helpful in implementation, to gain input and to communicate district intentions.
3. Review and plan curriculum.
4. Select one or two schools for first-year implementation.
5. Acquire appropriate materials, particularly in the area of literature.
6. Plan and implement the initial staff development program in preparation for program start-up.
7. Plan and prepare for counseling/student support component.

(Note: All of the above steps are essential and must be completed before moving towards this next phase in developing a program.)

First-Year Implementation Phase

1. Assess and place first student group.
2. Continue staff development effort throughout the year.
3. Continue curriculum review and revision.
4. Evaluate program to date.
5. Continue parent/community involvement effort.

Continuation Phase

1. Continue/strengthen instructional program.
2. Continue staff development effort.
3. Continue curriculum writing and revision.
4. Continue student support and, to the extent feasible, parent/community involvement effort.
5. Evaluate program to date.
6. When ready and to the extent that it is feasible and appropriate, replicate to other school sites in the system.

17. How can a school system accurately assess the linguistic and educational needs of newly-arrived West Indian students?

In some ways assessment procedures appropriate for CAEC-speaking students are similar to those used for limited English proficient students of other language groups. Like them, it is important to gain as complete a record as possible of the incoming student's academic history. For children from the West Indies, as with other parts of the world, this task is not easy. Parents are not aware of the importance of bringing these resources with them, and even when they are brought, it is often difficult to interpret the information they contain in ways that are practical and meaningful to teachers and administrators. It is important to identify those persons within the school district who are knowledgeable about the school systems and academic requirements of both the U.S. and the various sending countries.

Standardized testing of language proficiency and academic achievement have the same validity problems for West Indian students that they do for other language and cultural groups. School officials seeking more accurate and sensitive measurements have turned with moderate success to such procedures as elicited language sampling, informal or natural language assessments and cloze testing. Other forms of eclectic assessment

include informal interviews with students and portfolio assessment in varying academic subject areas. Portfolios are samplers of student work that are systematically collected by both students and teachers. Similar to portfolios used in other fields, they serve as a basis on which to examine effort, progress and ultimately achievement. Unlike traditional forms of assessment, portfolios assess what the students are actually learning and actively doing in the class, while also allowing students to have input and observe their own growth. Through reflection on systematic collections of student work, teachers and students can work jointly to highlight student strengths and weaknesses as well as prepare for future instruction. This type of assessment has various advantages over the more traditional, summative, standardized approaches. To the extent that portfolio assessment involves teachers in the process, it can lead towards and support the creation of classroom procedures that take into account students' actual class learning and encourages looking at the authentic language/s used by students as they actively engage in classroom discourse.

18. What are the most effective instructional strategies/approaches for meeting the academic and linguistic needs of West Indian students?

Effective programs for West Indian students are usually organized in coordination with the regular bilingual and ESL programs of the district. Therefore, some (though by no means all) of the instructional approaches that are appropriate for ESL learners can also be used with West Indian students. In certain respects, CAEC-speaking students are different from the students of other language groups enrolled in ESL programs. For instance, CAEC-speaking students are usually familiar with a far greater range of English vocabulary words than most beginning ESL students. The grammatical structures and sound patterns of their spoken language are often very different from English and may result in a confusing situation, not typical of most ESL students. CAEC-speaking students frequently do not perceive themselves as needing to develop their proficiency in English. They believe they already speak English, although, in fact, their language is very different and in many instances, unintelligible to speakers of American English.

It needs to be noted that many of the strategies that will be discussed are applicable across the curriculum and effective with most students and not just CAEC-speaking students. Therefore, these strategies are ones that a mainstream teacher would benefit from adopting for use in the classroom. Language learning occurs when students actively need to communicate and thereby learn the new language. Program administrators and teachers need to make a conscious effort to provide a link between the Caribbean Creole and the Standard American English. Language instruction should be integrated into the teaching of relevant academic content and should be relevant to the everyday life and experiences of the

students. Both in content and in process, lessons should emphasize education that is multicultural.

All students, including Creole speakers, who are in the process of mastering Standard American English, naturally make errors. These are positive indications that they are engaging in the time-consuming but productive trial-and-error effort that will lead toward proficient bilingualism. As they learn their second language, many students experience an interim phase when unusual, non-standard mixing of the two language systems takes place. This is a phenomenon known to professionals as "interlanguage". This is also a natural and normal outgrowth of the second language learning process. The most helpful approach by teachers wishing to facilitate second language acquisition for Creole-speaking students is to look beyond any errors which may occur to focus on the content of classroom communication and each student's contribution to it. At the same time, it is important to be aware of the opportunity we have as educators and as fluent speakers of the target language to "model" through clear, well-articulated speech, repetition and restatement the appropriate pronunciation and grammatically correct forms of language.

It should be the primary concern of the language and the classroom teacher of Creole-speaking West Indian students to serve as a facilitator of their linguistic and academic learning. Teachers do this by establishing a supportive environment in which language learning is as important to the life of the classroom as the learning of academic material. For example, when teaching a particular concept within a content area, it is important to remember that complex sentence structure, passive verbs and idiomatic expressions can confuse and obscure communication about the content area. Teachers need to speak in a straightforward manner, avoiding (at least initially) complex sentence structure, for example the use of dependent clauses. Learning aids such as pictures, charts, and realia can be extremely useful in enhancing the meaning of verbal communications . Similarly, all academic material will be learned more thoroughly if it is taught in a variety of ways over an extended period of time. As is true of most students, no matter what their linguistic or academic background, good teaching is exemplified through the willingness to develop teaching materials as alternatives to regular textbooks.

In general, teaching should focus on and reflect a holistic learning environment. Instructional approaches, such as language experience and other whole language and cooperative learning approaches are highly recommended. Spelling instruction, at least initially, should be teacher-directed and can be initiated as a result of informal, creative or journal writing assignments.

In summary, an instructional program that integrates an awareness and understanding of Creole with academic skills and second language acquisition is the

soundest instructional program for West Indians students. This should be done through a broad variety of learning experiences, including, but not limited to the following:[10]

Activity Ideas

- the use of proverbs and idioms from their country of origin;
- role playing and skits;
- creative writing;
- use of Caribbean literature, including writings that use Creole in stories, poems, folktales, etc.
- creating illustrative dictionaries and word glossaries;
- class newspapers and/or bulletins;
- the use of music (i.e., calypso, reggae, etc.);
- the use of videos and film;
- the use of art.

19. What are the most effective ways of reaching out to and involving the parents of West Indian students?

In countries of the West Indies, contacts between parents and teachers are usually a day to day occurrence, since most teachers and parents live in the same community and see each other frequently. Teachers in the Caribbean are highly respected and familiar figures. Parents hold the view that the formal education of their children is the responsibility of the school. They rarely visit the school, since this might be interpreted as interfering in the teacher's and school's domain. The school is not seen as a separate entity of the community; rather, it is an integral part. For this reason, teachers are expected to be involved in the community, rather than parents in the school. These differences suggest the need for teachers and administrators in the United States to assess their current approaches to involve parents and to develop outreach initiatives to families which are culturally consonant. To this end, some districts have opted to hold meetings at untraditional times such as on Saturdays or Sundays in order to reach working parents, some of whom hold more than one job. In order to accommodate parents, some teachers have chosen to make home visits and/or personal telephone calls, in the evenings, in place of school memos or letters. Community resources such as churches and local grocery

10 A helpful description of instructional activities and approaches appropriate to West Indian students is provided in *Caribbean Students in Canadian Schools: Book II.* (Coelho, Pippin Publishing Co., 1991).

stores/restaurants have also proven to be an alternate route in the improvement of parental involvement at the school level.

Another option is to use the district's social worker and/or community representative who can facilitate working with West Indian families. It is important to have someone who has had extensive experience working with Caribbean families, who knows and understands the culture. It is also essential to eliminate one-time-only meetings or events, and instead create a continuous, year-round, or at least, school year-round, calendar of opportunities for contacts between parents and the school.

Professionals working with students from the West Indies need to set aside the assumption that all parents are familiar with the school system. Remember, the school systems in many of the Caribbean countries are centralized and in many ways very different from our locally-controlled, decentralized system of education. Parents need certain aspects of our system explained to them, for instance grading and promotional policies, homework expectations, and testing, in order to become knowledgeable partners in the work of these schools.

20. What resources are available to administrators and teachers in New York State who are seeking to provide equitable, quality education for students from the West Indies?

While by no means abundant, there are a growing number of resources available that can be of assistance to administrators and teachers interested in beginning a program. As an example, the staff of the Multicultural Education Center at Baruch has developed a series of training institutes for policy-makers, teachers and administrators over the past five years. Materials from these Institutes, which can be adapted for district and school-based training efforts, are available through the Center.

Another organization that has been actively involved in program support is the Division of Bilingual Education of the New York State Education Department. All of the Training Institutes undertaken by the staff of the Multicultural Education Center have been co-sponsored by the Division. It is also a good source for state-wide statistical information and program description data.

Within the New York City Board of Education, the Brooklyn-based ESL Unit of the Division of Bilingual Education has served for many years as another important contact point in the professional network concerned with issues relating to West Indian students. It is this unit (formerly the Office of Bilingual Education) that first brought together practitioners and language specialists to focus on the instructional needs of West Indian students in New York City schools and it continues to play a significant and active role in

providing technical assistance to school districts, particularly in the area of program models and development.

Finally, the Caribbean Research Center at Medgar Evers College located in Brooklyn, New York, is another useful organization. The Center has devoted significant thought and effort to coordinating and encouraging scholarly research in areas related to the West Indian communities of the region, including educational aspects. In addition, it has established an Education Task Force that provides technical assistance to school districts and organizations as well as individuals, for a minimal fee.

The names of these organizations and programs and others which can be useful resources to educators seeking to develop effective programs are listed in the Appendix of this paper.

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Appendix

Resource Organizations for Teachers and Administrators of Programs serving West Indian Students

Equity Assistance Center (Federal Region B)
National Origin Unit
Baruch College/City University of New York
Box #400
17 Lexington Ave.
New York, New York 10010
(212) 387-1116

Division of Bilingual Education
New York State Education Department
Bilingual Education Technical Assistance Center
350 Martha Ave.
Bellport, New York 11713
(516) 289-2200

ESL Unit
Division of Bilingual Education
New York City Board of Education
131 Livingston St.
Brooklyn, NY 11201
(718) 935-3908

Caribbean Research Center
Medgar Evers College
1150 Carroll Street
Brooklyn, New York 11225
(718) 270-6422

OFFICE OF THE COMMUNITY SUPERINTENDENT
School District 19
557 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE
BROOKLYN, NEW YORK 11207-5799
TELEPHONE: (718) 257-6900

CORINNA GRANT, President
MARIA IRIZARRY, 1st Vice President
MARK S. PENDARVIS, 2nd Vice President
GWENERDETTE BATTLE, Secretary
MONICA MOSELEY, Treasurer
GLORIA B. CORLEY
ELINORE MANDELL
IRIS PABON
JESSIE L. WHITTINGHAM

LEVANDER LILLY
Community Superintendent

Office of Bilingual/ESL Program , District 19
Addressing the Needs of the English Creole Student
Per Session Workshops for Teachers
3:30 - 5:30 P.M.
Series I: April 8, 9, 15, 16, 17
Series II: April 22, 23, 24, 29, 30

A G E N D A

Frances Camacho, Coordinator of Bilingual Programs
Veronica Quail, Bilingual Staff Developer/Coordinator of Immigrant Program

Welcome:	Veronica Quail
Greetings:	Frances Camacho
Presentations:	Dr. George Irish Caribbean Research Center, Medgar Evers College
	Dr. Narvaez, Director, Multicultural Center, Baruch College
	Dr. Carl Folkes, Program Specialist Division of Bilingual Education, Board of Education
	Dr. Clement London, Professor of Education Fordham University
	John Darrel, Mentor, Former Assistant Principal
	Dr. Gloria Gordon, Research Associate Caribbean Research Center, Medgar Evers College
	Evelyn Carrillo, Bilingual Staff Developer Community School District #19

April 8, 22* (George Irish)
Overview of cultural, educational and linguistic characteristics of the student population and their families.
Socio-cultural factors involved in the transition from the Caribbean to North America.

April 9, 29* (John Darrel, Dr. Clement London)
Understanding West Indian dialects and assessing students' language and educational needs in the classroom.
How are Caribbean students faring in our schools?

April 15, 23* (Dr. Narvaez)
Using Caribbean literature in the classroom.
Strategies for language instruction.
Additional language strategies.

April 16, 30* (Gloria Gordon, Evelyn Carillo)
Designing a curriculum for Caribbean background students.
Objectives of the language program.
Reaching out to and involving parents. What teachers can do.

April 17, 24* (Carl Folkes)
Drawing on literacy traditions of the English speaking countries of the Caribbean.
Linguistic objectives in SESD.